

William Irwin (DUP), Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

I'm William Irwin, currently Chairperson of Agriculture Committee at Stormont. We in the Agriculture Committee hold the minister to account on the main issues. We also are very strong on defending the farmer in Northern Ireland.

Farmgate Prices

One big issue facing farmers at the moment is the farmgate prices. Farmers, at the moment, are receiving very low returns for their produce and the committee has great concerns. We're meeting with the Groceries Code Adjudicator in a few weeks' time.

The big problem is that we have large retailers that, in effect, control the price. They buy at their price, and sell at their price. It means that the farmers are getting very, very small returns, and indeed, in some instances at the moment, the farmer's actually losing.

Agri Food Industry

The agri food industry is very important to Northern Ireland, indeed, it's vital to Northern Ireland. Indeed, in the recession of 2008 the agri food industry was the industry that pulled Northern Ireland through that recession and out the other end. And we export 80 percent of our product from Northern Ireland to the mainland, Britain, and right across Europe.

The issues that really affect the strength of sterling against the euro. A weak euro means we get less returns for our produce. So in effect, at the moment, we have a very weak euro, and that has compounded the situation in relation to prices at the farmgate.

Sustainable Agriculture

I believe that one very important aspect of sustainable agriculture in Northern Ireland is that we produce food in a way that doesn't damage our environment. I think that is very important for the future.

People more and more are concerned about the environment. But I think farmers in Northern Ireland are very good at what they do. They can produce food equally as well as anywhere else in Europe and maybe even across the world. But it is important, again, as I've said before, that we get more young people interested and more young people involved because they are the future.